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3-1-2018

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Publication Info

2018, pages 112-125.

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POEMS AND SONGS
SPURIOUSLY ATTRIBUTED TO ROBERT BURNS

(1996)

The meteoric rise in the reputation of Robert Burns is well known. He had never published a poem before he brought out his *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* in 1786 in a printing of 612 copies, which were sold out three and a half months later. In 1787 there was published an edition in Edinburgh, probably numbering 3,250 copies, as well as an edition in London and piracies in Belfast and Dublin; the following year there were further piracies published in Philadelphia and New York. By December 19, 1786, the first of Burns's poems to appear in a newspaper was published in the *Caledonian Mercury*. Following established eighteenth-century practice the poet never used his own name; in fact he wrote to his friend Alexander Cunningham, "I would scorn to put my name to a Newspaper Poem."¹ Naturally this custom made it impossible for the uninformed to know whether a work signed by an author was genuine or spurious, any more than the reader was likely to know who was author of an anonymous or pseudonymous poem. And, of course, the better known an author was, the more likely it was that these works were attributed to him or her. Obviously Burns's fame ensured that his name was associated with numerous poems which were not of his writing.

One of the places where one would least expect to find "spurious" Burns poems is one to which he was openly a contributor from 1787 until his death nine years later. James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* appeared in six volumes, each containing one hundred songs, between 1787 and 1803. In the Preface to the first volume, Johnson laments that there is no collection of Scottish song which may be called "A Complete

¹ *The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy (Oxford, 1985), I, p. 405.

Collection” and offers to fill this gap, at the same time inviting those who know of songs or music to submit them in order that they may be “preserved in this Repository of our National Music and Song.”² Just before vol. I appeared, Burns made the acquaintance of Johnson, the two hit it off immediately, and Burns began sending material to him. Only three songs by the poet appeared in the first volume, but he contributed 32 to vol. II, 40 to vol. III, 47 to vol. IV, 37 to vol. V, and 18 to vol. VI. Sensing Burns’s commitment to the project, Johnson, a humble and modest man, allowed the poet free rein in deciding what was to appear in vols. 2-6—one could say that during his lifetime (vol. V appeared the year of his death, and without Burns’s encouragement it took Johnson from 1796 until 1803 to bring out the final volume) Burns was the *de facto* editor of the *Museum*. He scoured through the miscellanies of the time, particularly Allan Ramsay’s *Tea-Table Miscellany* (4 vols., 1723-1737, frequently reprinted in the eighteenth century), as he did also for another editor with whom he collaborated, George Thomson of the *Select Collection of Original Scottish [sic] Airs*, which appeared in eight parts between 1793 and 1818. Thomson was rather careful in attributing works to the correct author, but Johnson was not; in fact he was at times quite confusing (perhaps confused, too) in what he attributed to Burns. In vol. II of the *Scots Musical Museum* we find in the table of contents “Landlady count the lawing.” Tradition says that this tune was King Robert the Bruce’s “March at the Battle of Bannockburn” (Song 170), which has as title where the song appears (II, 178) the name of the air “Hey Tutti Taiti,” with no mention of Burns at all. While there are traditional fragments in the song, no editor has had any qualms about including it as Burns’s. This lack of organization on Johnson’s part of course led to other songs in the *Museum* which certainly were not by the Bard being credited to him on the perfectly justifiable premise that Johnson had just neglected to give credit where it was due.³

In *Burns A-Z*, James Mackay lists twenty songs from the *Museum* which have been credited to the poet, including the earliest sixteen (Mackay lists the entries chronologically by date of publication).⁴ The

² James Johnson, ed. *The Scots Musical Museum*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh, 1787-1803), I, iii.

³ [Cf. Murray Pittock, “Who Wrote the *Scots Musical Museum*?” [W. Ormiston Roy Memorial Lecture],” *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 42:1 (2016): 3-27. Eds.]

⁴ James A Mackay, comp., *Burns A-Z: The Complete Word Finder* (Dumfries, 1990).

first one (1790) entitled "The Captive Ribband," is in sixteen lines, opening thus:

Dear Myra, the captive ribband's mine,
'Twas all my faithful love could gain.
And would you ask me to resign,
The sole reward that crowns my pain.
It shall upon my bosom live,
Or clasp me in a close embrace... (p. 699)

One would be tempted to dismiss this work on stylistic grounds—Burns wrote better than that.

A song which was unattributed in Johnson, "Hey how Johnie Lad" (No. 357), was later claimed to be by Burns, but of the sixteen lines twelve appear in David Herd's collection.⁵ Of those which are not in Herd (lines 9-12), James Mackay says that there are "no grounds for ascribing... [them] to Burns" (p. 703). This highlights a recurrent problem with editors of Burns, their over-willingness, even enthusiasm, to ascribe works to Burns without first having checked earlier sources. This is particularly true of songs which appear in Johnson and Thomson, for whose works the poet not only wrote but also assiduously collected from both oral and published sources. I am myself guilty of unwittingly introducing one such poem to the spurious Burns canon. When James Kinsley's collecting of material for his edition was almost completed I came into possession of a Burns MS of eight lines beginning "As I walk'd by mysel, I said to mysel," and immediately sent him off a photocopy of it. The lines appeared in his edition as the last entry in the Appendix with the following note: "probably traditional."⁶ He was, of course, right because the eight lines are to be found in Herd (II, 229) to the tune "Green Sleeves." Mackay reprints the entry (p. 763) from Kinsley without further comment.

People who ran across songs in Burns's correspondence frequently did not know how often the poet incorporated songs from other sources into these letters without comment, neither claiming them nor denying they were his. For instance, "O as I was kist yestreen" appears in the *Musical Museum* as No. 319 (1792), but it had appeared in 1776 in Herd's collection. In 1794 Burns wrote, probably to Alexander Findlater, and included four lines of ebullient verse from Herd, but the unwary

⁵ *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, etc. Collected from Memory, Tradition and Ancient Authors*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1776), II, 215-216.

⁶ *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), II, 932.

might easily gather the impression that the lines were by Burns. Even as respected a scholar as William Stenhouse, who wrote a long introduction to a new edition of the *Scots Musical Museum* in 1839, was mistaken upon occasion in attributing works to the poet which were not his, several of which are noted in Mackay's *Burns A-Z*.

Burns's early enthusiasm for the French Revolution is well known, and so we are not surprised to find spurious revolutionary works attributed to him. One such, entitled "Fragment of a Revolutionary Song," opens

Why should we idly waste our prime

Repeating our oppressions?

Come, rouse to arms, 'tis now the time

To punish past transgressions (Mackay, p. 731).

Once it became known that Burns had written "Scots wha ha'e" and "For a' that and a' that" ("Is there, for honest Poverty"), readers were ready to accept him as the author of other radical verse.

"Watty and Meg; or the Wife Reformed" may have been published as early as 1792, two years before its author Alexander Wilson emigrated to the United States where he made his name as an ornithologist, although there is no known copy of the work printed before 1795. The poem was an immediate success, appearing anonymously numerous times. Wilson, a Paisley man, had some small local reputation as poet, but as the fame of the poem spread throughout Scotland and beyond, it is not surprising to find that in its early years it was widely attributed to Burns. The latter's works which he frequently submitted anonymously have long been identified, often by the author himself. "Scots Wha Hae," for instance, first appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* of London on May 8, 1794, but Burns also openly sent it to George Thomson who published it in 1799 in his *Select Collection*. These poems and songs need not detain us further.

James Kinsley, in the standard scholarly edition of Burns containing 605 poems and songs which he accepts as those of the poet, adds an additional fifty-four which he labels Dubia. Some of the entries under this rubric were only collected by Burns, who never claimed them as his own, although they were at various periods attributed to him. There are several songs which Burns merely collected for use in Johnson's *Musical Museum*. The editor was not careful with his Table of Contents, so that his attributions were not always accurate. Thus we find Song 328, "O'er the Moor amang the Heather," listed as Burns's when in fact he only collected it from Jean Glover, whom Kinsley describes as "an itinerant whore and thief" (*Poems*, II, 917). Not a great deal of the poet's

correspondence with Johnson has survived, so that we do not know exactly how he presented the song to his editor. We know from his correspondence with Thomson, most of which appears to have survived, that Burns was himself sometimes vague about the provenance of a song.

Nowhere do we see this better than in the statements which he made about his best-known song, "Auld Lang Syne." In a letter to his friend and benefactor Mrs. Frances Dunlop he speaks of it as "an old song & tune which has often thrilled thro' my soul" (*Letters*, I, 342); after having transcribed the song he added, "Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired Poet who composed this glorious Fragment!" (*Letters*, II, 345). Five years later he was still unwilling to admit the song as his own. To George Thomson he sent it for inclusion in the *Select Collection*:

The air is but mediocre; but the following song, the old Song of the olden times, & which has never been in print, nor even in manuscript, untill [sic] I took it down from an old man's singing; is enough to recommend any air— (*Letters*, II, 246).

Today no one doubts that except for the phrase "auld lang syne" and an idea here and there, the body of the song is Burns's.⁷ Was the poet having fun with Mrs. Dunlop when he calls the author "heaven-inspired," knowing that she might well guess who the author was? And was he being modest when he sent the words to Thomson? We shall never know.

When Patrick Heron stood for Parliament in 1796 Burns wrote four election ballads, at least three of which were circulated as anonymous broadsides. Apparently the opposing side circulated others with the poet's name on them, and Burns was incensed at these spurious pieces, calling them, "a flagrant instance of the Poetica Licentia" (*Letters*, II, 348). Free-wheeling use of calumny for political purposes was nothing new at this time, but it points to Burns's reputation that his name would be used for this sort of deception.

Once Burns was dead, it became much easier to present as his poems, or songs (even letters upon occasion), which he had not written. An early example of this is to be found in a single sheet, most likely printed in the first decade after his death, entitled "Burns's Death-Bed Song". It consists of three eight-line stanzas, beginning:

I'm wearing awa', Jean,
Like snaw when it's thaw, Jean;

⁷ For an excellent discussion of those earlier songs which use the phrase, see *The Poetry of Robert Burns*, ed. W.E. Henley and T.F. Henderson, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1896-7), III, 407-410.

I'm wearing awa', Jean,
To the land o' the leel.

There's nae sorrow there, Jean,
There's nae cauld nor care, Jean,
An' the day's ay fair, Jean,
I' the land o' the leel.⁸

What is astonishing about this production is that the title of the work was "The Land o' the Leal," and that it was originally written by Caroline Oliphant, Lady Nairne, in 1798. The voice is that of a woman speaking to her man, John:

I'm wearin' awa', John,
Like snaw-wreaths in thaw, John,
I'm wearin' awa'
To the land o' the leal.⁹

Rogers notes that Caroline Oliphant, Lady Nairne, wrote the poem in 1798 to console her friend Mary Anne Colquhoun (née Erskine) for the loss of a child, but swore her to secrecy as to the author of the song (p. 279-80). In old age Lady Nairne wrote:

I was present when it was asserted that Burns composed it on his death-bed, and that he had it Jean instead of "John"; but the parties could not decide why it never appeared in his works, as his last song should have done. I never answered. (p. 281)

The slip containing "Burns's Death-Bed Song" is extremely rare, but the idea that it was Burns who wrote "The Land o' the Leal" persisted well into the twentieth century.¹⁰ The "Death-Bed" version differs from that of Lady Nairne in the number of lines and in their arrangement. If we divide each eight-line stanza in two parts we note that the arrangement of "Burns's Death-Bed Song" has the following sequence : 1A, 1B, 2B, 3A, 2A (in a corrupt form), 3B, with sections 2B and 3A in Nairne not present in the "Death-Bed" version. These read:

But sorrow's sel' wears past, John,
And joy's a-comin' fast, John,
The joy that's aye to last
In the land o' the leal.

⁸ This apparently unrecorded version of the poem is in the G. Ross Roy Collection at the University of South Carolina

⁹ Charles Rogers, ed., *Life and Songs of the Baroness Nairne with a Memoir and Poems of Caroline Oliphant the Younger*, 2nd edn. (London, 1869), p. 163.

¹⁰ See, for example, Alexander Crichton, *"The Land o' the Leal" Irrefutably Proved to be the Deathbed Valediction of Robert Burns* (Peterhead, 1919).

Sae dear's that joy was bought, John,
 Sae free the battle fought, John,
 That sinfu' man e'er brought

To the land o' the leal. (Rogers, p. 163-4)

According to Charles Rogers the quatrain beginning "Sae dear's that joy was bought" was added later "when the writer became more enlightened respecting the Gospel scheme."¹¹ If this statement is accurate, Lady Nairne probably added the other quatrain quoted above at the same time.

In Mackay's *Burns A-Z* we find a more corrupt version than that of the "Death-Bed Song" and an entirely new four lines:

Sweet helpmate through my toil, Jean,
 I aft hae thocht thy smile, Jean,
 An angel might beguile

Frae the land o the leal! (p. 746)

This version is in all probability of considerably later date, although it did not first appear, as Mackay claims, in 1876. He states that he took his text from the William Scott Douglas edition, but it is not to be found there. In any case it is probably a later version of the "Death-Bed" poem, because all six quatrains of the latter appear in Lady Nairne and there is only one corrupt quatrain; Mackay's version has two corrupt quatrains and the one quoted above, which is not to be found in the original.

Quoting G.F. Graham, Rogers says the song was published about 1800; Graham writes, "the author is still unknown. The words were originally 'I'm wearin' awa', John'; they seem to have been altered with the intention of making the song appear to be the parting address of Burns..."¹² The reason for examining "The Land o' the Leal" at some length is that it is by far the most famous poem or song to be mistakenly attributed to Burns. It is interesting to note, too, that the air to the song is "Hey tutti taiti," the tune for which the Bard wrote "Scots wha hae," a very ancient air to which, Burns believed, Robert the Bruce's army marched to the Battle of Bannockburn (*Letters*, II, 235).

Lady Nairne was not the only well-known writer to have a poem ascribed to Burns, however. He was also credited by Allan Cunningham in 1834 with having written "Shelah O' Neil." According to Mackay it was dropped from the edition Cunningham brought out in 1842 after the editor discovered that the song had been written by Sir Alexander

¹¹ Rogers, p. 280.

¹² G.F. Graham, *Songs of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Wood, 1848), I, p. 78.

Boswell. The damage was done, however, because “it appeared in several other 19th century editions” (Mackay, p. 730). The poem begins:

When first I began for to sigh and to woo her,
Of many fine things I did say a great deal,
But above all the rest, that which pleased her the best,
Was, oh! will you marry me, Shelah O’ Neil?

Things don’t work out very well for the protagonist and he runs off, ending up in Frederick’s army participating in all of the battles where he:

Felt sharp shot, alas! and the sharp-pointed steel;
But, in all my wars round, thank my stars I ne’er found
Ought so sharp as the tongue of cursed Shelah O’ Neil.

Unlike many spurious Burns poems, this one is respectable quality verse, but to a person familiar with the Burnsian vocabulary the expression “say a great deal” does not ring true; in fact the poet used the word “deal” in this sense only once, in the line “To you the dotard has a deal to say” in his “Prologue Spoken at the Theatre of Dumfries on New Year’s Day Evening, 1790.” Since the work was written to be spoken to an audience, it is in standard English, which may account for Burns’s use of the word.

Another well-known author whose work was credited to Burns was Henry Mackenzie, who sent “On the Destruction of Drumlanrig Woods” to the *Scots Magazine*, where it appeared in 1803 with the note that it was “supposed to have been written by Burns.” According to Mackay, Mackenzie told James Currie, editor of the first collected works of Burns in 1800, that the poem was his, “which I passed as written by Burns in a fit of indignation at the wood on the river Nith being cut down by the Duke of Queensberry” (Mackay, p. 733). As late as 1897, T.F. Henderson was still admitting the verses to the canon, although he acknowledged reservations, saying “one could credit Mackenzie with them far more easily than one could credit Burns” (Henley & Henderson, IV, 106). Like Boswell’s song, “Drumlanrig Woods” is nothing to despise, as we can determine from the first four lines of the poem:

As on the banks of winding Nith
Ae smiling simmer morn I stray’d,
And traced its bonie holms and haughs [low-lying grounds
Where linties sang, and lammies play’d, [linnets

Mackenzie, of course, knew Burns’s work well; it was he who wrote the famous review of the poet’s 1786 volume for *The Lounger* (which he edited), coining the phrase “heaven-taught ploughman” which both helped and harmed Burns. It is not surprising, then, that we find genuine echoes of the poet in a poem which he intended passing off as Burns’s work. A single line from “Address to Edinburgh,” which was published

in 1787, "As on the banks of Ayr I stray'd," became the first two lines in Mackenzie's poem quoted above. The same sentiment was expressed in a variant of the poem "The Laddies by the Banks o' Nith," which opens "As I cam doon the banks o' Nith" (Henley & Henderson, II, 398), although one should not make too much of a single line because Burns used the name a number of times and wrote of the "winding Nith" more than once.

Other poems misattributed to Burns appear obviously to have been inspired by genuine ones. "Extemporaneous Grace on a Haggis" (Mackay, p. 747) is an interesting example:

Ye powers who gie us a' that's guid,
 Still bless auld Caledonia's brood
 Wi great John Barleycorn's heart's bluid,
 In stoups or luggies; [tankards; wooden bowls or pails
 And on our board the king o food,
 A glorious haggis!

If one compares that incidental verse with the final stanza of "To a Haggis" one sees the source for the extemporaneous grace:

Ye Pow'rs wha mak mankind your care,
 And dish them out their bill o' fare,
 Auld Scotland wants nae skinking ware [watery
 That jaups in luggies; [splashes
 But, if ye wish her gratefu' pray'r,
 Gie her a *Haggis* ! (Kinsley, I, 312)

The act which increased the tax on Scotch whisky introduced by William Pitt's government so annoyed the poet that he wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister, signing it John Barleycorn, which was published in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* of February 9, 1789. Enough people knew that Burns was the author of this piece that R.H. Cromek published it in *Reliques of Robert Burns* in 1808. We are not surprised, then, to find "A Familiar Epistle to Mr Pitt" (Mackay, p. 709) credited to the poet also. Under the title "Cheap Whisky" the poem first appeared in vol. III of *Poetry; Original and Selected* published by the Glasgow firm of Brash & Reid in 1797 or 1798. The second of fifteen stanzas reads:

We hail thee now as state physician,
 Saving the kintra frae perdition !
 'Gainst democrates nae inquisition
 Ye mair need raise,

For, tho in state of requisition
We'll sound thy praise.

While not a great poem, it is one of the better spurious poems to be credited to Burns.

As stories about Burns's life, not infrequently embellished, spread after his death there were reports of his interest in and composition of bawdy poetry; it is not surprising, therefore, to find spurious bawdy poems circulated as being the work of the master. We know that Burns had made a collection of bawdy songs, the present whereabouts of which is not known, because he mentions it in a letter to John M'Murdo of February (?) 1792:

I think I once mentioned something to you of a Collection of Scots Songs I have for some years been making: I send you a perusal of what I have gathered... There is not another copy of the Collection in the world, & I should be sorry that any unfortunate negligence should deprive me of what has cost me a good deal of pains (*Letters*, II, 138).

It may have been that the contents of this collection became *The Merry Muses of Caledonia: A Collection of Favourite Scots Songs, Ancient and Modern; Selected for the Use of the Crochallan Fencibles*. The first known edition of *The Merry Muses*, dated 1799, has no listed publisher, and Burns's name nowhere appears in the volume. There are 122 pages of text which contain 88 poems, only six of which are these days accepted as by Burns. But at an earlier time it was generally believed that Burns was the author of all the *Merry Muses* poems and songs. Another title appeared, probably in the period 1870-1880, *Forbidden Fruit. A Collection of Popular Tales... Also the Expurgated Poems of Robert Burns*. These two books had a very limited sale (only two copies of the 1799 *Merry Muses* are known to survive) and it was not until an edition bearing the spurious date 1827 (though actually assumed to have been first issued in 1872), that there was a fairly widely circulated edition available. The title is *The Merry Muses—A Choice Collection of Favourite Songs Gathered from Many Sources. By Robert Burns*. There is a heading on the title-page which reads "Not for Maids, Ministers, or Striplings" as well as four lines of erotic verse. Before the date we read "Privately printed (not for sale)," obviously placed there for legal reasons, although copies were, of course, sold. What is accepted as the first of the 1827 editions bears the limitation 99 copies, but as they are not numbered

little credence should be placed in this statement. Numerous copies of this volume have appeared, most of them dated 1827.¹³

I have discussed elsewhere how Burns's first editor James Currie falsified the letter quoted above to M'Murdo by adding the sentence "A very few of them are my own."¹⁴ Suffice to say here that every editor since Currie in 1800 until my edition of 1985 has repeated that sentence as proof that Burns was not really interested in writing bawdry, when a close reading of the poet's correspondence shows that he was very interested in erotic verse. The "1827" edition quotes the letter to M'Murdo (p. ix-x) as so-called proof of the statement:

It is the glory of Burns, however, that he improved every song that passed through his hands... [in his collecting he also] came across others whose humour was more broad, and language and meaning decidedly free.... In time what he thus collected he was led in a few instances also to imitate. (p. ix).

The text itself of this edition is divided into three sections: Scottish (p. 1-58), English (p. 59-103), Irish (104-125). We are told in the Preface that songs by Burns appear first, although there is no indication where these end and other Scottish material begins. The fiction that Burns had been portrayed as an innocent victim, guiltless of writing bawdy poems and songs persisted however; as late as 1911 the Editor of the *Burns Chronicle*, Duncan M'Naught, issued under the auspices of the Burns Federation *The Merry Muses of Caledonia... A Vindication of Robert Burns in Connection with the above Publication and the Spurious Editions which succeeded it*, a work which he was careful to sign only under the pseudonym Vindex. And so, depending upon what a reader wished to believe, there was available a large body of bawdy poems and songs, several of which we have good reason to believe are from Burns's pen.

No work has had more influence than *The Merry Muses* in propagating as Burns's own so many spurious erotic poems and songs. A genuinely scholarly edition was published in 1959 which points out which poems are by Burns, which were collected by him, and which are

¹³ For a discussion of the contents of these volumes see G. Legman, "The Merry Muses as Erotic Folklore" in his *The Horn Book: Studies in Erotic Folklore and Bibliography* (New Hyde Park, NY, 1964), pp. 170-236. For a bibliographical description see my article "The '1827' Edition of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*," *Burns Chronicle*, 4th series, 11 (1986), 32-45.

¹⁴ See my "Editing Robert Burns in the Nineteenth Century," in *Burns Now*, ed. Kenneth Simpson (Edinburgh, 1994), 129-149 [and in this volume, pp. 158-173].

spurious.¹⁵ It could not however prevent further editions claiming as Burns's poems which there is no evidence that he wrote. Since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, editors have been free to print bawdy material openly, so we are not surprised to find Eric Lemuel Randall issuing a book entitled *The Merry Muses and Other Burnsian Frolics... From the Secret Collections of Robert Burns* (London, 1966). The unsuspecting would infer from this title that the editor had access to hitherto unknown manuscript material, which is, of course, not true. The only "secret collection" which Burns ever had was the one which he loaned to John M'Murdo mentioned earlier. It is well known from the poet's letters that he frequently rewrote traditional bawdy songs, giving them words which could be printed and sung by anyone. Randall has printed the bawdy versions, sometimes implying that Burns wrote these also. Taken at random, No. 8 in the collection is "As I cam o'er the Cairney mount," where we have this opening stanza:

As I cam o'er the Cairney mount,
 And down amang the blooming heather,
 The Highland laddie drew his durk [fig. penis
 And sheath'd it in my wanton leather. [fig. sexual organ

Burns commented on the air "the old Highland laddie" which, he said, "pleases me... It is sometimes called, Ginglan Johnnie; it being the air of an old humorous bawdy song of that name" (*Letters*, II, 242). What Burns did was to send James Johnson his own version of the song for publication in *The Scots Musical Museum*:

As I cam o'er the Cairney mount,
 And down amang the blooming heather,
 Kindly stood the milkin-shiel [milking shed
 To shelter frae the stormy weather. (Kinsley, II, 862)

It has been said that Burns cleansed the mouth of Scotland, and here we have an excellent example. What is interesting in the context of this essay, however, is to see how pervasive are the attempts to fob off as Burns's bawdy or erotic poems and songs some of which he knew and some of which he had apparently never heard.

I have delayed mention of an earlier collection because it does not appear to have been widely known. In 1823 an edition of Burns with the title *The Songs and Ballads of Robert Burns: Including ten never before*

¹⁵ *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, ed. James Barke and Sydney Goodsir Smith, with a Prefatory Note by J. DeLancey Ferguson (Edinburgh, 1959). Even this edition has Robert Burns on the title page as author.

Printed was published. It contained the promised ten poems, none of them, apparently, by Burns. Instead of placing them together, they were scattered throughout the volume. The new material was not very risqué though, as we see in these lines from “The Patriarchs”:

King Davie, when he waxed auld,
 And blude ran thin, and a’ that,
 And fand himsel still growing cauld,
 Could not refrain for a’ that.
 For a’ that, and a’ that,
 To keep him warm, and a’ that,
 The daughters of Jerusalem
 Were wyl’d for him, and a’ that. [destined]

Wha wadna pity the sweet dames
 He fumbled at, and a’ that,
 And rais’d their blude up into flames
 He couldna drown, for a’ that. (p. 178)

Today we would dismiss this as “soft core porn” but the publishers of the book must have felt uneasy because in 1825, the sheets were bound up with a new title-page purporting to have been issued by an apparently fictitious publisher.

No one appears to have printed a vulgar song attributed to Burns which to my knowledge goes back at least to the end of the nineteenth century, and which my friend Kenneth Simpson heard recited as traditional at the Greenock Burns Club recently. The story goes that the poet was the worse for drink and was being ill over the side of Leith Bridge. When asked what he was doing he replied:

I’m Robert Burns the poet,
 I’m on the Brig o’ Leith,
 I’ve lost the key to my arse,
 And I’m shyting through my teeth.

Doubtless there are further as yet uncollected spurious Burns poems. To garner them all it would be necessary to go through every edition of Burns and to look through all the newspapers and magazines of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as the belles lettres of the period. The making of heroes means that exploits will be repeated and embellished in the popular mind. It has been generally accepted, for instance, that when Burns was ignored by the landlord of an inn because the Duke of Argyll had arrived, the poet scratched on a windowpane the ill-natured epigram:

Whoe’er he be that sojourns here,
 I pity much his case,

Unless he come to wait upon
 The Lord their God, his Grace.
 There's naething here but Highland pride,
 And Highland scab and hunger;
 If Providence has sent me here,
 'Twas surely in an anger (Kinsley, I, 340).

After these lines were first published, in 1801, the idea of Burns scratching a poem on a windowpane caught the fancy of his admirers, and Mackay's *Burns A-Z* lists four more poems scratched onto handy windows or, in one case, the top of a marble sideboard at the Hermitage belonging to the Duke of Atholl. With fifty-four lines, the duke must not have been very pleased by the behavior of his guest!

On another occasion Burns visited the city of Stirling where he is reputed to have written on another windowpane the ten lines beginning:

Here Stewarts once in triumph reign'd,
 And laws for Scotland's weal ordain'd
 ...
 The injur'd Stewart line are gone,
 A Race outlandish fill their throne;
 An idiot race, to honour lost;
 Who know them best despise them most (Kinsley, I, 348).

Mackay quotes a quatrain which it is claimed was written by the poet "by way of self reproof for writing the lines against the House of Hanover":

Rash mortal, and slanderous poet, thy name
 Shall no longer appear in the records of Fame;
 Dost not know that old Mansfield, who writes like the Bible,
 Says the more 'tis a truth, Sir, the more 'tis a libel? (Mackay, p. 747).

Burns also, so tradition goes, destroyed the windowpane, an act of prudence if the tale be true.

We have seen, then, that spurious Burns poems ran the gamut of the types of poetry which he really did write—love songs, humorous poems, patriotic works, protests and bawdy productions. The imitations of Burns which are the subject of this essay serve to stress how profound was his influence on his followers for over a century. As Charles Caleb Colton wrote, "Imitation is the sincerest flattery."